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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, June 17, 1932

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "A Gypsy Meal for Saturday Night." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

The very best picnic I ever attended was the result of a wager. It took place about a year ago and the credit for its success belongs entirely to Uncle Ebenezer.

Jack Lee, our neighbor, had dropped over one warm June evening. The conversation began with the weather and then somehow turned to picnics.

At the word "picnic," Jack Lee shook his head violently and made a gesture of "thumbs down."

"Nope," said he, "I'm opposed to picnics. I tell my wife she can leave me out when it comes to meals on the ground. I prefer to take my food in comfort at the dining table. Why any sane people consider picnics a pleasure is more than I can understand. Hard work and lots of discomfort is all I can see to such doings. The women spend half the day getting ready. Then you all trudge out to the country, seat yourselves uncomfortably on the ground and try to look pleasant over cold and dreary food, which has been pretty well shaken up by the trip from home. Sloppy sandwiches that leak salad dressing at every bite, salad that is sure to slide off your paper plate, sticky cake that gets all over your fingers, half-cold coffee and melted ice cream. Ants and other bugs in the jam or butter. You try to look pleasant all through the ordeal, even when your wife confesses that she forgot several things and there isn't enough to go around. But when the children step in a hornets' nest or fall headfirst into the stream--

"Oh, come now," put in Uncle Ebenezer, "really--

"Don't talk to me," Jack continued firmly, "I've suffered through enough picnics to know a thing or two. So nowadays I vote no!, whenever anyone proposes picnics."

"Look here," said Uncle Silas, "there are picnics and picnics, some good and some bad. You've had unfortunate experiences. But I've been to lots of good ones. In fact, I always like picnics."

"Yes," agreed Uncle Ebenezer, "Silas and I may not be as young and spry as we once were, but we still enjoy gypsy meals outdoors. I maintain that a good picnic is a simple and easy affair to arrange. It's a matter of making plans ahead of time, of system, organization and---"

"And the right food, Ebenezer."

"And the right utensils to go with it, Silas."

"Well," declared Jack Lee, "I'm not from Missouri, but you'll have to show me just the same."

"Good," said Uncle Ebenezer enthusiastically. "Let's show him. What do you say, Aunt Sammy? The entire Lee family is hereby invited to a gypsy meal in the open on Saturday night. Just our family and yours. And we'll cook most of the food outside. That's usually less work and more fun."

So the men put up a wager on the picnic, and Uncle Ebenezer planned and ran the whole affair. A successful affair it was, too. Even Jack Lee had to admit it.

Here's the menu Uncle Ebenezer planned. Maybe you'd like to get your pencil and take it down as we go. Then you'll have plans all made the next time you want to go outside for a meal.

First item on the menu--steak, broiled over the coals or--, if you prefer,-- pan-broiled in a big camp skillet. Then, potato chips to go with it or potato salad brought from home in a screw-top jar. Buttered rolls. It's easy to take along the butter and spread the rolls while the steak is cooking. By the way, large flat round soft rolls are convenient to hold steak or tomatoes. Next, a jar of mixed bread-and-butter pickles. Then, either tomatoes eaten whole like apples or sliced and laid inside the rolls, or crisp cucumber sticks, eaten like celery. You can peel the cucumbers at the picnic and cut them lengthwise into sticks, or fix them at home, crisp them with ice and take them to the picnic in waxed paper.

For dessert, Uncle Ebenezer planned assorted fruits of the season. If you take along strawberries, as he did, it's best to wash them at home and serve them in their natural state. The stem makes a nice handle to hold each berry with while you dip the end in powdered sugar. Finally, there's coffee, made over the campfire, and some cookies or little cakes to go with it. Be sure your cakes aren't sticky and are small enough to handle easily.

There's the menu. Now for Uncle Ebenezer's list of equipment to use for such a meal.

(Please read slowly.)

Matches, a few sticks of dry kindling and some newspapers to start the fire.

Several sharp knives, large and small.

Knives, forks and spoons, picnic plates and cups for the crowd.

A sturdy grill to put over the fire. A meat broiler with a long

handle to hold the meat and turn it from side to side. Or, a long-handled frying pan.

Next, a long-handled fork and spoon.

A screw top jar to hold the sugar. Salt and pepper shakers. Some have a special fastening on top and can't shake out while traveling.

For coffee, a small cooking pail or a camp coffee pot.

Napkins for everybody.

Then a towel and soap for the children, and, if you believe in safety first, some iodine and some salve for burns.

You can make your picnic equipment as fancy and elaborate or as simple and primitive as you please. But if you enjoy this form of recreation, it's a good idea to keep a special corner in the pantry and kitchen where your equipment is collected and always ready to go.

For automobile picnics, it's handy to own a hamper and keep it ready packed with plates, paper napkins, knives, forks, spoons, cups, can openers and so on.

I've seen an old suitcase made into a beautiful picnic hamper. Strips of tape sewed onto the lining held the utensils.

Now as to the picnic spot, that's something else to consider beforehand. Uncle Ebenezer prefers a nice woodsy place where there are some flat topped rocks or rustic tables of the proper height. And if you're going by automobile, he suggests taking along some old cushions to show the Jack Lees of your party what a nice easy chair can be made of a cushion or two and a rock or tree trunk.

Oh, my. I almost forgot to mention the grate for your fire. Regular camping grates, you know, have four folding wire legs which you can plant firmly in the ground. Such a grate can hold both the coffee pot and the meat broiler if you like.

I think Uncle Ebenezer wants the last word today. He has some advice to offer about the fire for a successful picnic.

"A large flaming fire burns your hands, smokes your face and blackens your food. Woodsmen learned long ago that coals do the best cooking and are more convenient to use. So build your fire of dry and seasoned wood half an hour or so before you want it. Let it burn down to coals and replenish it occasionally until a deep bed of glowing embers accumulates. Then you'll have a fire that will do justice to the best of steaks."

Guess I'd better repeat that picnic menu. The lady over here on the left says she didn't get it all.

Steak, either broiled or pan-broiled; Potato chips or potato salad; Buttered rolls; Mixed pickles; Whole tomatoes, or cucumber sticks with salt; Assorted fruit; Coffee; Little cakes or cookies.

"But, suppose," says Arabella, "that I want to have just a very simple family meal, cooked maybe in my own back yard."

We suggest the following for such an occasion:

Soft round rolls filled with crisp bacon. Everyone present can cook his own bacon on a long stick or a long toasting fork. The rolls can be toasted in the same way. Add to this bacon-and-roll sandwich a slice of tomato, a crisp piece of lettuce and a very thin slice of Spanish onion. That toasted sandwich, you see, makes almost a meal in itself, all prepared right on the spot. For dessert, serve fresh pineapple, cookies, and coffee-- also made on the spot.

About that fresh pineapple: Wash it at home and carry it to the picnic whole. Don't peel the pineapple but cut it up into sections, like an orange, using a very sharp knife. These sections, cut first lengthwise and then crosswise, make convenient little chunks to handle and eat, as the French would say, *au naturel*. Each person takes a few chunks on his plate with a little pile of sugar. He dips the pineapple into the sugar and then eats it out of the shell.

Monday: "Saving Day."

